Digital Library Issues: Exploring Collaboration

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Abstract

Collaboration is an issue that digital libraries continue to work through. This paper discusses how collaboration is defined in digital libraries, as well as the necessity for collaborations in digital libraries, the partners that digital libraries collaborate with, and the future of collaboration in digital libraries.

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Digital Library Issues: Exploring Collaboration

Digital libraries are growing as technology continues to improve. While digital libraries are seeing increased use, they are also dealing with many issues. A growing issue in digital libraries is collaboration. As digital libraries grow and look to better serve users digital libraries must collaborate with partners to fulfill the needs of said users. In this paper the issue of collaboration will be explored by defining collaboration and what it means in digital libraries. Furthermore, the necessity of collaboration in digital libraries will be discussed. Then the types of entities or partners that digital libraries collaborate with will be investigated. Finally, the paper will conclude with a discussion of what collaboration means for the future of digital libraries.

Defining Collaboration

The Oxford Dictionary defines collaboration as working with another to produce something (Oxford, 2016). While such a simple definition seems sufficient, collaboration in digital libraries require more than just working together to produce something. The something that digital libraries produce is of great value and must be tended to after the production. To that end, S. Buchanan, F. Gibb, S. Simmons, and D. McMenemy (2012), have defined collaboration as a partnership that is more involved during the process of working together, sometimes changing one or both digital libraries procedures to produce a more valuable and usable collection. Buchanan and partners further state the collaboration tends to continue once the collection is made available to its users. By this definition, collaboration is not a static process. Instead collaboration is a dynamic process. For the purposes of this paper the definition of collaboration will be a dynamic process in which a digital library and one or more entities work together to produce and, or continually partner to maintain the collection(s).
Collaboration: A Necessity

A key factor in the necessity of collaboration in digital libraries is a lack of resources. The first major resource is funding. Mindell and Russell (2014) said, "...our budgetary constraints would make collaboration a key part of the planning process," when referring to the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library's digital collections (p. 6). Working with the university's ITS department and the ResCarta foundation helped the Murphy Library bring its digital library to fruition for far less than the price of some pieces of digitization equipment. Funding issues are not relegated to digital libraries in the academic sector. Buchanan et al. (2012) note that digital libraries in the public sector face the same challenges because they must compete for their funding (p. 341). In fact, digital libraries are reliant more so on donations and government funding than a university which gets some of its monies from tuition. Buchanan et al. (2012) further note that partnering with other entities make funding easier to get, at least in the United Kingdom because the government is more generous in its giving to collaborative projects (p.341). The Indianapolis Public Library's iLibrary housing it reference databases is an example of a library receiving government funding and partnering with another entity to bring its digital library to its users (see figure below).
While funding is a significant resource, digital libraries cannot get off the ground without the people and time dedicated to them. Bunker and Zick (1999) said, "No one organization or type of professional, working alone, has all the needed talents and resources," about the need for collaboration in digital libraries. This is still true today. Libraries, especially digital libraries are cannot have all the information and resources available to man. Laster (2012) stated that leadership of the personnel working in collaboration is essential and requires the leader to have enough time to dedicate to a digital project (p. 29). Thus, digital libraries must consider who will man the digital projects when collaborating and which organization will oversee what tasks.

**Collaboration Partners**

It may seem obvious that libraries collaborate with other libraries to bring their digital collections to life. However, it might not seem as obvious as to what scale at which libraries partner on digital collaborations. On a local level, digital libraries can partner within the same system in a city. On a regional level, like that of the Mountain West Digital Library (MWDL), libraries can collaborate across state lines. (See MWDL's partner map below.)

On a national level, Clausen and Glenn (2012) note that the Federal Depository Library Program
helps libraries collaborate to make many of the government documents accessible to the public (p. 4). Collaborations among digital libraries are thus very common and very effective uses of resources.

Digital libraries collaborate with other partners as well to produce their collections. Browne (2015) noted that digital libraries can work with publishers to create better standards for e-book publication that best suits users’ needs (p. 25). As standards are improved upon it becomes easier for digital libraries to make their materials accessible. Bull and Quimby (2016) also argued that libraries need to work with publishers to create metadata for e-books (p. 148). The overall ability to work with other entities gives digital libraries the chance to market materials that will be used in the future. For example, several institutions in Ohio worked together to produce the War Relocation Authority digital collection that was already being used as a physical teacher resource by Denison University (Laster, 2012). This collaboration effort helped preserve the physical collection by making it available digitally so that students might continue to explore the collection without harming the physical collection.

**Future of Collaboration.**

With the rapid expansion of technology, it is apparent that digital libraries and their collections are not going anywhere anytime soon. Digital libraries have come a long way since Bunker and Zick (1999) admitted that no one person or organization has the resources to produce comprehensive collections. However, digital libraries still have work to do when it comes to collaboration. Mitropoulos, Baltasis, Rodios, and Douligeris (2014) introduced the SociaLib system which was said to make digital libraries more collaborative in nature. SociaLib pushed beyond the collaborations at the librarian level and made collaboration at the user level a viable use of the digital library. As digital libraries continue with collaboration efforts tools like
SociaLib allow users to be in control of the information they want to see. Users are the main concern of digital libraries and should continue to be the focus of all collections. Collaborations should always consider the end-user.
References


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